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Viewing cable 09QUITO449, PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL TO PRESIDENT CORREA ADDS TO PRESS

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09QUITO449**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09QUITO449	2009-06-15 12:06	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/13/1/1355/cable-212121-II.html>

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0449 1661206
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 151206Z JUN 09 ZDK ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0466
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8185
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN LIMA 3243
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3584
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 0320
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4374

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000449

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY DECL DATE ADDED
E.O. 12958: N/A DECL 6/15/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL TO PRESIDENT CORREA ADDS TO PRESS
FREEDOM DEBATE IN ECUADOR

...

id: 212121
date: 6/15/2009 12:06
refid: 09QUITO449
origin: Embassy Quito
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination:
header:
VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0449 1661206
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 151206Z JUN 09 ZDK ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0466
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8185
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN LIMA 3243
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3584
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 0320
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4374

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000449

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY DECL DATE ADDED
E.O. 12958: N/A DECL 6/15/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL TO PRESIDENT CORREA ADDS TO PRESS
FREEDOM DEBATE IN ECUADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Initial Ecuadorian government and media reaction to President Obama's June 10 phone call to President Correa focused on President Obama's message of congratulation for Correa's reelection and his desire to deepen U.S.-Ecuador relations, but did not include extensive comments on his expression of support for a free and independent press. The Ecuadorian president's office released the White House press statement on the call without any official comment.

However, on June 11 President Correa gave a speech where he argued that one cannot confuse freedom of expression with private, for-profit media companies "that do not pay taxes and are often owned by ghost foreign companies." Media coverage June 12 changed and focused on President Obama's press freedom message, noting it came at the very moment that the Ecuadorian TV and Radio Council (CONARTEL) was taking administrative actions against TV station Teleamazonas that could lead to its closure (reftels). End Summary

¶2. (U) News of President Obama's June 10 call to President Correa began to circulate in Ecuador on June 11, after the White House statement was released and wire-service reports of the call that stressed Obama's desire for "improved ties with Ecuador's Correa" were published. The Ecuadorian president's office released the text of the White House statement in English and Spanish versions the morning of June 11 without any comment or reaction attributed to President Correa. That same morning, however, President Correa gave a speech at the change of command ceremony for the Ecuadorian Police where he strongly criticized the Ecuadorian media and made extensive comments on his ideas on freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

¶3. (U) In that speech Correa said that no one can be above the law in Ecuador, but that unfortunately there are some sectors of Ecuadorian society that are accustomed to acting with complete impunity and that have committed clear infractions of the law. Without mentioning Teleamazonas by name, he defended CONARTEL's current administrative actions against the channel and said, "There is no freedom without responsibility. I will never permit prior censorship of the media, but by the same token I will firmly apply the law to uphold the abused (concept of) freedom of expression." Summing up his populist rhetoric against the media that "prostitute

sacred words such as liberty," he said, "I am prepared to give my life in defense of freedom of expression."

¶4. (U) Ecuadorian media on June 12 picked up the second half of President Obama's message to Correa in such headlines as, "Obama advocates for a free press in Ecuador," and "Obama asks Correa for a free and independent press." These reports linked President Obama's message in support of a free and independent press with the GOE's current administrative actions against Teleamazonas, led by CONARTEL, which could lead to the station's closing. This reporting placed President Obama's congratulatory call in the middle of the current debate in Ecuador on press freedom prompted by President Correa's long-standing, ongoing attacks on the media, which in the case of Teleamazonas could lead to the first outright shutdown of an independent media outlet under Correa.

¶5. (U) In what is perhaps a sign that some members of Correa's own Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) movement are becoming uncomfortable with CONARTEL's hardball tactics against Teleamazonas, on June 11 PAIS assembly member Maria Paula Romo asked that the head of CONARTEL, Antonio Garcia, appear before the Assembly's Special Committee on Civil and Penal Affairs to give testimony about the sanctions it has been handing out against media outlets. She is quoted as saying that if Ecuadorian laws governing the media were equally applied to all media outlets, "probably none would remain open."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: From his June 11 remarks it seems clear that Correa intends to remain on the attack against the media and use populist arguments that "no one is above the law" to argue that the media abuse their right to freedom of expression, do not deserve to be trusted with that right, and should be fully prosecuted for abuses of prevailing press laws even if that leads to the closing of media outlets. Now that leading Ecuadorian media outlets have used President Obama's statement in their own defense to criticize Correa's actions against them, it remains to be seen whether Correa will become defensive and in turn criticize the President's defense of freedom of the press. President Obama's message that a free press is a necessary and important goal for both countries was timely and has had a significant impact on the ongoing debate here about the role of a free press in a vibrant democracy. No doubt the Department's statement on Freedom of Expression in the Western Hemisphere will get broad coverage this weekend.
HODGES

=====CABLE ENDS=====